

PROGRESSIVE KING OF SIAM.

He Introduces Reforms in a Thoroughly Practical Way.
Special Correspondence of THE STAR.

NEW YORK, Jan. 9.—At one of the up town hotels John Barrett, our former minister to Siam, has been staying. He was born in Vermont about 33 years ago and, after graduating at Dartmouth college, removed to the Pacific coast. There he ultimately connected himself with the Portland Evening Telegram and became a student of matters connected with the far east. During the year 1888, before going west, Mr. Barrett made a tour of the southern states and wrote a series of



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articles which Henry W. Grady said did more to acquaint the north with the new south than any other influence of that kind.

When Mr. Cleveland wanted to send a capable man to Siam to settle important claims and other matters affecting American treaty rights in all Asia, he selected Mr. Barrett, who was supported by the six United States senators from the three Pacific states and also indorsed by many chambers of commerce and representative bodies. Mr. Barrett served his country with credit, and when sent to Siam was the youngest foreign minister who ever represented the United States.

"The king of Siam," said Mr. Barrett, "is one of the most remarkable men in the world. He is one of the most intelligent and farseeing statesmen in all Asia. When a lad, he was taught the English language by a lady from Nova Scotia named Mrs. Leonowens. She was invited to visit Siam for this very purpose, and she afterward wrote a number of books regarding the manners and customs of the Siamese."

"The king has a most pleasing personality. He is of medium height and weighs, I should judge, about 165 pounds. He has a complete command of the English language and dresses with perfect taste. While he usually wears the native costumes, he also appears, if the occasion demands, in the latest garments which have been imported from London. The king has refined manners and would not be out of place in the swellest club in this country."

"The king is one of the best speakers I have ever heard. He enunciates his words so distinctly that his voice could easily fill such a hall as the Chicago Auditorium. In Siam he frequently addresses audiences in the open air, and every one of thousands of persons can distinctly hear what he has to say."

"The king reads our most important newspapers and magazines. He receives daily Reuter's telegraphic service and keeps informed of what is going on all over the world. He follows events in our country and observes very keenly the course of our political contests. I remember that during the campaign of 1896 he turned to me and asked, 'Well, Mr. Barrett, what do you think of Mr. Bryan's chances of being elected?'"

"The king has but one official wife, and it is her son who will succeed to the throne. There are, of course, many women connected with his household, but in no sense is a harem maintained such as belongs to the Turkish monarchs. The building where these women reside is more like the dormitory of one of our girls' colleges. The eldest son of the king is the crown prince, and he is at school in England, where he has been studying for six years. The crown prince has a better understanding of the English language than he has of Siamese, and it is the intention that when he becomes of age he shall take unto himself but one wife and at no time any more."

"It is a fact not generally known that the king of Siam is the head of the Buddhist church. He is a student of religious systems and is familiar with the Bible. He is better acquainted with the contents of this book than the average intelligent and educated citizen of our own country. The king believes that the Bible is a great religious work. He also holds that Christianity and Buddhism are very similar and that the difference between these two re-

ligions is far less than that between many of the sects of Christianity.

"I remember an incident which took place at the funeral of the former crown prince, who died some years ago. The sermon was preached by the chief priest of the Buddhist church. All of the foreign diplomats were present, and each of us was furnished with a copy of the sermon in advance. It was printed in Siamese and also in English. After we had read it many of the diplomats remarked what a close similarity there was to the doctrines of Christianity. To this opinion we all agreed. Later, as dean or ranking member of the diplomatic corps, I said to the king, 'Your majesty, my colleagues and I have noticed what a close resemblance the principles and ideas of this sermon bear to those of Christianity.' Without a moment's hesitation the king replied, 'Well, I am quite sure that it is one of the most perfect statements of Buddhist doctrines ever made.'

"It should be stated that the king is liberal and tolerant in his treatment of other religions. He is an admirer of missionaries and supports their efforts and labors. The king believes in allowing his subjects liberty of thought and conscience. He lets them do their own thinking and says that if they wish to forsake Buddhism he would rather have them become Christians than leave their native faith and become nothing at all."

"The king is conservatively progressive. He appreciates as well as any one the advantages of European and American civilization. He realizes, however, that his people are not yet entirely ready for radical changes. He has in mind many reforms which he hopes to institute before he dies. At the present time the king's policy is to build railroads in one section, and when their advantages are proved more lines are added in other parts. Then, too, the king, instead of making wholesale reforms in the courts all over the country, begins in one province and then extends them to another. Thus the work of elevating Siam is going on gradually and surely."

"The views of the king upon the present worldwide movement of the white races toward Asiatic dominion are very interesting. It may be asked how he regards the efforts on the part of certain European nations to secure a foothold in China, what he thinks of the fierce scramble for trading privileges with the nations on the shores of the Pacific. The king first of all points to the many ruins which are to be found all over Asia and claims that they prove conclusively that the brown and yellow races have not been indolent and pleasure loving alone. The grand old temples of India, Siam and Java, the Chinese wall and the innumerable extensive ruins scattered all over Asia are cases in point. We must remember also that a high state of civilization once existed there, and something happened."

"First, Alexander the Great, with his hordes of soldiers, invaded India. Later there was a great migration in Asia, corresponding in time and influence to the capture of Rome by the Goths. The barbarians swarmed down upon India and Siam and carried away their wealth and destroyed their ac-



JOHN BARRETT.

cumulated art. Temples were overthrown, palaces were ruined, and men were enslaved. Desolation remained, and these peoples have not in the intervening centuries been able to regain their former position."

"In the meantime the white races have built upon this stolen foundation a magnificent civilization. In the course of time they have come to the point when for their own preservation it is necessary to seek much closer intercourse with the southern races of Asia. Now the king welcomes this change. He believes that the white races are returning as a saving influence to lift up the yellow races. The Europeans and Americans come back almost as teachers to introduce their methods and habits. The king is not alarmed, but looks forward to the time when his people will emulate the achievements of the white races."

"I mentioned before that the king was a gentleman. I happen to recall as evidence of this an incident which

I witnessed. The king owns a magnificent yacht of 2,000 tons burden and 15 knots speed. The vessel is equal in every respect to any American's private yacht. On the occasion of a certain celebration elaborate fireworks were set off on the Menam river, and the king invited the foreign representatives to come aboard his yacht and view the display. The king and queen sat in front, while I, with the wife of one of my colleagues, was directly back of the royal pair. The evening was cool, and the lady at my side becoming cold asked in a very low tone if I would not go and get her wrap. Before I had time even to start the king suddenly sprang up, took off the cape which he wore and politely and quickly placed it over her shoulders. She accepted the favor and wore the coat until I returned with her own. This little act shows the extreme thoughtfulness of the king."

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